

FARMERS' PARTICIPATION AT THE PIKE PLACE MARKET -

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

by Alice Shorett

In 1907 the King County farming community and the general public of Seattle joined in a move to establish a public market where the producing farmer could meet the consumer directly. Prior to any public market, there were at least two layers between the producer and consumer. The farmer sold to the wholesale commission house, which in turn sold to the peddlers, who sold to the consumer. Peddlers bought their goods from wholesale firms on Western Avenue early in the morning and then traveled by horse-drawn cart through the neighborhoods of Seattle.

Food prices in Seattle had risen 33-1/3% over the period of one year, 1906-1907. The wholesale "commission" houses on Western Avenue were charged with causing the skyrocketing prices. It was reported that waterfront commission men were using trap doors for dumping surplus produce into Puget Sound to keep prices up. Another conviction, reported in several articles in August, 1907, issues of the Seattle Times, was that wholesale merchants often paid farmers for only a portion of their produce, declaring the remainder had spoiled, but in actuality, selling the whole shipment.

The publicity of the alleged practices of waterfront wholesalers led to the passage of a public market ordinance in Seattle and the establishment of a public market at Pike Place. Farmers came in considerable numbers in the early years - over rutted dirt roads from Kent, Auburn, South Park, Georgetown and Bothell, and via steamer from Poulsbo, Scandia, Keyport and Bainbridge and Vashon Islands.

In the early years the public markets belonged to the farmers. On Saturdays they lined both sides of Pike Place, with carts backed up against the curbs, from Pike Street to Virginia. Customers wandered through streets of colorful carts laden with fruits and vegetables, children ran underfoot, horses stood beside carts - in short, Pike Place was completely given over to marketing activity every day except Sunday. In 1923 this changed. The farmers were forced to move off the street and a series of controversies began about farmers' space in the public market.

Since the Second World War, the number of farmers attending the Pike Place Market has steadily diminished. Reasons for this decline are many, a few of which are: industrialization and commercial expansion in King County, development of modernized farming methods, and "historical incidents" which have forced farmers off the land.

One incident in history which reduced the number of "dry" farmers (those selling chickens, eggs, butter, meat) was the reduction and eventual elimination of steamer service to small communities in Puget Sound. The Liberty Bay run of steamer days touched the small farming community docks of Poulsbo, Scandia, Pearson, Lemolo, Keyport, Agate Pass, and Suquamish. The boat which traveled this route during most of the steamer era was the Verona, familiarly called "the farmers' boat". On market days, particularly Fridays and Saturdays, the steamer's forward deck was loaded with baskets of chickens, eggs, and butter. There were no

freight charges for articles carried on the forward deck. The farmer's pattern was stepping from community docking, loading goods on deck, riding to Seattle and unloading at Seattle into a delivery wagon which drove up to the public market. However, with the departure of most steamers in 1928, there was no regular service to these small farming communities in Liberty Bay. A similar situation existed on Vashon Island, where fruit production was the farming livelihood. The new ferries did not stop at many small community docks and there was no way of handling cargo aboard the ferries. As a consequence, hundreds of small farmers stopped traveling to the Pike Place Market in the late 1920's. A few farmers continued to deliver chickens, eggs, and butter by truck on the ferries, but the majority of these truck deliveries were made to wholesale firms.

A second incident which dramatically reduced the number of vegetable farmers at the Pike Place Market was the World War II evacuation of citizens of Japanese descent from the West Coast. Between 75 to 80% of the farmers' stalls on "wet" vegetable row were occupied by Japanese truck gardeners prior to the spring of 1942 when the evacuation order was given. The City-controlled stalls in "farmer's row" reflected the evacuation in vacancies. The Federal Government attempted to encourage others to take up the gap in farming through low interest loans given through the Farm Security Administration. Many people went into farming in the evacuated Green River Valley, but farmer's row at the public market never returned to the crowded activity common prior to the war.

River silt is the finest farm land and, naturally, farm communities built up around the Green River and the Duwamish, south of Seattle. Prior to the 1960 era, a majority of the farmers offering vegetables and fresh produce on the "wet row" at the Pike Place Market farmed in the valleys of Kent, Auburn, Georgetown and South Park. Recent industrialization of this farm land has been the result of wage competition, building of Hanson Dam, zoning alterations, and land speculation.

In 1962, the Hanson Dam was built on the Green River to keep the river within its banks on the assumption that the valley between Kent and Auburn would continue as an agricultural area. But with the threat of flooding no longer a problem, industrial interests such as Boeing began buying up the land. The municipalities of Kent and Tukwila gradually expanded their boundaries to include more and more of the Green River Valley. As the farm land was included within municipal boundaries, it was rezoned for commercial-industrial use and taxed accordingly. As a result, there was a period of intense land speculation in the valley between 1966 and 1968 and the majority of farmers sold their land. They couldn't afford not to sell out at the prices offered nor could they afford to stay on the land paying the industrial/commercial rate taxes. In addition, farm labor was difficult to come by when nearby Boeing drained the labor market and raised wage expectations beyond the farmer's payment capacity.

In the Georgetown and South Park farming communities, industrialization encroached as the "industrial basin" south of Seattle expanded. The only room for this expansion was to be found in the Duwamish valley. Boeing and other commercial interests bought up the land. Again, zoning changed and taxes rose. A blow to the farm community of South Park came in mid-1960 as the State Highway Commission forged a freeway through the middle of prime farmland. In South Park alone, five or six farmers were forced out of business.

South Park community, neighbor to Boeing, could not compete with the wages offered by the aerospace industry. Sons and daughters and even the farmers themselves left the farm to work at Boeing. The farming life style was not attractive to the younger generation - long hours from sun-up to sun-down, unpredictable earnings dependent upon the whims of Nature, and a life tied to one place all year around.

World War II ushered in an age of technology which affected the farming industry. With tractors and planting machinery available, farming could be done on a large scale. There was a turn from truck gardening to single crop farming, and the pattern of small truck gardens encircling the cities diminished. Seattle was no exception in this trend. Farmers turned to production of a few crops which could be machine planted and, if possible, machine harvested.

Single crop production was not tailored to the public marketing concept of daily or once-weekly sale of farm produce in season. Many of the crops were harvested in the period of one or two weeks. The public market did not afford the storage space nor the volume of sales necessary to the single crop farmer. Farmer's time was more profitably spend supervising, harvesting, planting and delivering, than spent selling produce.

It is easier and more profitable for the machine oriented farmer to deliver his produce to refrigerated wholesale house of either a chain store or a wholesale produce operation. There are a few truck gardeners left in King, Snohomish, and Kitsap Counties, but the concept is dying and new people are not setting up truck gardens, making produce available for sale. This trend is evidenced in the dwindling numbers of farmers in the Pike Place Market "wet" row.

This paper summarizes the history of the farmer in the public market, and social trends affecting small farming in the Seattle area. The question of whether or not the institution of small farming can be revived and the public market once again filled with farmers requires separate and serious examination.

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FARMERS AT THE PIKE PLACE MARKET -

NUMERICAL RECORD

BY Pat Fukuda

Records on the number of farmer-sellers at the Pike Place Markets were found dating back to 1926. However, there were periods, ranging from one to as many as twenty years, for which no records could be found and apparently none were kept. Nevertheless, sufficient data was found to give some indication of the pattern of decline in the number of farmer-sellers at the Market over a 45 year span. The accompanying table shows the number of Permits issued by the Market Master to farmers who rented tables at the Market. Since each farmer is required to take out a Permit to sell his own produce at the Market and only one Permit is issued per farm, the number of Permits issued in any year should also be the number of farmer-sellers who are at the Market that same year. The accompanying graph illustrates the same data. Where data was lacking, the two immediate years for which data was available were connected by a straight line (dotted or broken line).

It can readily be seen that there was a substantial decline in the number of farmer-sellers at the Market at the start of the Depression in 1929, but that the Pike Place Market bounced back by 1932 to the 1926 level. From 1932, however, there was a steady decrease in the number of farmer-sellers, except for the small increase between 1937 and 1939, down to the present. The sharp decline in farmer-sellers between 1939 and 1943 can be generally attributed to World War II. During this period, many farmers left agriculture to work in war-oriented industries, and the Japanese farmers were placed in relocation camps.

The last decline occurred between the years of 1946 and 1969. Unfortunately, we have no data on the number of farmer-sellers attending the Market during the 1946 to 1966 period. Trends during this period in vegetable farming in the state as a whole indicate that the curve between 1946 and 1966 might be convex downward.

The number of farmer-sellers at the Pike Place Markets reached an all-time low of 42 in 1969. There has been a mild recovery such that the 1971 total surpassed any year since 1965. The increase of farmers in 1970 and 1971 cannot be readily explained. It was not due to the opening of the Public Market to all farmers west of the Cascades, as really all the new farmers in 1971 were from the four counties (King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties) previously included in the Market. One might conclude that the publicity leading to the Historical Initiative may have attracted some of the farmers to the Market. There is also some evidence that a few old-timers returned to the Market after a several-year layoff.

PKF:tw

July 31, 1971

retyped:db

October 30, 1974

Number of Farmers Using Pike Place Public Market
(By permit sales or number of permits issued)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>REVENUE FROM PERMIT SALES</u>	<u>PERMITS ISSUED</u>
1925		570
1926		627
1929		488
1931		550
1932	\$628.00	628
1933	596.00	596
1934	572.10	572
1935	494.00	494
1936	425.00	425
1937	418.20	418
1938	486.30	486
1939		515
1943	196.50	196
1944	199.00	199
1946		200
1966	171.00	57
1967	196.70	51
1968	150.60	47
1969	140.00	42
1970	150.00	50
1971	191.30	64

NUMBER OF FARMERS USING PIKE PLACE PUBLIC MARKET 1925 - 1971 (BY NUMBER OF PERMITS ISSUED)

